

A MIDDLEBURY SEARCH

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December, 2012**

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John M. McCardell, Jr., announced in Mead Chapel on Tuesday, November 18, 2003, that he would resign as the 15th President of Middlebury College on June 30, 2004, after thirteen years. He would become President Emeritus and College Professor and be on leave for the academic year, 2004-2005, before returning to the History Department to teach during the fall semesters. Trustee Frederick M. Fritz '68 would serve as Chair of the Search Committee; the Board at its meeting in New York City in early December would appoint seven other Trustees, and the selection process for seven faculty and staff members was not announced. An outside search firm [A.T. Kearney Education Practice], moreover, had already started the search process.

What follows is not a history of the presidential search based on official documents. It contains only my recollection of events, with my memory refreshed by emails on my laptop. It discusses the steps leading to the letter sent to the search committee by twenty-five full professors expressing their belief that the committee should select McCardell's successor from outside Middlebury. More important, it presents my information about the search committee's refusal to interview or to give more than a cursory consideration to an outstanding educator and scholar; indeed, it never acknowledged his application. Finally, I recall a private and relevant conversation with John McCardell in January, 2005.

When I returned from Mead Chapel to my office I had an email inviting me to a reception later that afternoon at 3 South Street, the President's House. It was a relatively small gathering of John and Bonnie's friends, as well as Fritz. John told me that the announcement had been carefully planned to occur after the College's Family and Homecoming Weekends and that the committee expected to announce the new president by April, 2004. One colleague, Robert W. Hill, Henry Norman Hudson Professor of English, told Fritz that it was very important for Middlebury College for the new president to come from the outside. Some of us learned that evening that Ron Liebowitz, Executive Vice President and Provost, was taking a Winter/Spring leave to become a candidate, and that would be announced a week later.

That evening I wrote John a short note, emphasizing that my association with him over twenty-seven years had "expanded my abilities as a historian and greatly enriched my association with Middlebury College. Thank you." I concluded, expressing "my admiration for your career and achievement in the Department and Old Chapel."

As I wrote the letter and found it difficult to focus on my class discussions in the morning on the Korean War and McCarthyism, recollections came to mind. Initially, I had not read any significance into a comment John had made to me earlier at the annual Henry Sheldon Museum dinner at the Kirk Center. He had mentioned that he and Bonnie

had just purchased a house with some fifty acres in Cornwall, outside Middlebury, and were selling the house they had owned for some fifteen years in Cornwall.

I remembered a dinner I had had in mid-June, 2002, at a Princeton classmate's home in Edgartown. His houseguests were Robert P. Youngman '64, a Middlebury Trustee (1980-1996) and former Board Chair (1993-1996), and his wife. Youngman told me that John, at first, had not impressed him, and he had asked John to prepare a statement with his vision for the College. What John then presented had, indeed, impressed him. During a discussion before dinner about the College's successful Bicentennial campaign for \$200,000,000, I mentioned that I had heard comments about an unofficial \$100,000,000 campaign underway. Youngman said "yes," noting that some of the trustees were quite concerned about the amount; he quickly added, however, that John had pledged to stay at least three years--which would be until 2004.

And I recalled two other important conversations. I had been on leave, 2001-2002, and when I returned for classes that fall several colleagues stated they had been told that Ron recently had turned down the presidency of Colgate, after being assured he would be John's successor at Middlebury. I quickly replied that, if true, it would be terribly awkward for John, especially at Trustees' Meetings; they repeated what they had said. One question, for me, was: Did the full Board know about that commitment?¹ Later that fall, I served on an outside committee reviewing the Colby College History Department. One morning over a cup of coffee I had a long, interesting conversation with the Dean of Faculty. He told me that Ron had been on the short list for the Colby presidency in 2000. While the Colby search committee had heard that Middlebury saw Ron as McCardell's successor, its first choice had been William D. Adams. He accepted and is still Colby's president.²

Continuing my rumination that evening, I wrote down, without taking time to notice the typos: "John has done a fantastic job fund-raising and promoting the college—I may not like the Commons direction and, esp. its costs, but he deserves enormous credit for his leadership." I worried that the search committee was too large, and adding the "trustees, all hand-picked, are convinced college is on the right course, doing great, and therefore no need for any changes.... So, a search with people realizing a dominant inside candidate and Ron gets it.... The ambitions of 10-15 faculty and administrators depend on Ron becoming President. Will one or two of them be on the search committee??"

¹ Two comments. Initially, I was familiar with a less awkward situation. Trinity College announced in 1965 that my father would retire as president in 1968 when he was 68; the College in 1967 appointed his successor, who would be on leave from the college, and not in Hartford, during that last year, 1967-1968. Second, I have studied carefully Columbia University's search for a successor to her world-famous president, Nicholas Murray Butler, and selection of General Dwight D. Eisenhower in *Eisenhower at Columbia* (Transaction Publishers: New Brunswick and London, 2001).

² November 18, 2002. Professor Eric Nelson recently told me that a Bowdoin College presidential search committee had interviewed Ron in late 2001 or early 2002 off-campus. He added that a committee member had told him they had concluded that Ron was too much about business and not enough about academics and scholarship. Nelson to TBJ, December 5, 2012.

Interesting. Gee, some might have to go back to full-time teaching and grading. They would much rather run the college for the next decade or so.”

“Obviously,” I noted, “I think going outside is necessary if the college is to continue to move forward. Except for ‘one Light year,’” referring to Timothy Light, who had come to Middlebury in 1990 and was fired in 1991, “it has been 28 years since Olin [Robison] arrived. And this is not to diminish what John has accomplished (nor Ron’s abilities, though I do not think he has John’s strengths).... Of course, people such as me will be told that Tim Light is a good reason for not going outside when you can go inside. Yet, I doubt if any of the colleges ‘with which we normally like to associate ourselves’ has had two insiders in a row. But the trustees rightly have the say...”³

Before going to the reception at 3 South Street, I emailed John Spencer: “Had thought it would not happen for another year,” without mentioning what Milt Peterson had told me about John’s commitment to the College for three years. Spencer had joined the History Department in 1974, had served four years as Dean of the College and, upon his retirement in 1998 had become a Trustee. I wrote: “Do hope the college goes outside.” John replied: “I agree that the new person (almost said ‘man’) should come from the outside. I’ve asked to be on the Search Committee, but haven’t heard from Churchill [Franklin, the Board Chair] yet.... That’s off the record.” On December 7th I wrote: “For several reasons, more than a few believe that the search is set up for the Provost.”⁴

In early December the Search Committee announced its composition which included, among others, John Spencer and four faculty members: Carol Rifelj, Larry Yarbrough, Ray Coish, and Jim Ralph.⁵ In addition to supporters for Ron Liebowitz’s candidacy, many believed that a president from outside would be best for the College and among them there were faculty members who did not want Ron. I told a few friends and colleagues my belief that the College, after nearly three decades, had an excellent opportunity for a new person to lead Middlebury into the future. I added my view that little could be done beyond a number of senior faculty members expressing their opinion in a letter to the search committee. That December, however, I was preoccupied with spending January in Tunisia.

In November I had received a Fulbright Senior Specialists Fellowship to teach recent American history in Tunis. Besides grading fall term exams and papers quickly, I had to prepare what I needed for my classes at the University of La Manouba. The students were M.A. candidates in American Studies and most of them could not afford books, even if books were available at that late date. I was advised to prepare and send material for photocopying at the university. I departed on New Year’s Day; teaching at the university and making friends with several Tunisians was a great experience for me.

³ TBJ, notes, Nov. 18, 2003.

⁴ TBJ to Spencer, Nov. 18, 2003; Spencer to TBJ, Dec. 2, 2003; TBJ to Spencer, Dec. 7, 2003.

⁵ The committee had eight trustees and four faculty, and the students, staff, and alumni each had a representative.

When I returned in early February on the eve of classes, a number of faculty colleagues were expressing their frustration, their sense that the Search Committee was not listening to their concern for a president from outside Middlebury; their arguments were not anti-Ron. I repeated that I really did not have any suggestions, except for possibly sending a letter to the committee from a number of senior faculty members. These colleagues were asking for my thoughts largely because they had signed in 1995 a petition, that I had organized, urging the Trustees to reconsider their endorsement of John McCardell's proposal for a Residential Commons system. That petition had evolved from discussions with two junior colleagues in the History Department whose views I respected. I drafted a memorandum and showed it to a few close friends. The memo quickly gained a life of its own, and twenty full professors, including fourteen holding endowed chairs, signed a one-page statement. I gave the petition to the trustees running two open meetings on the Commons proposal, and a colleague handed it to a trustee at a third meeting. Though the petition was discussed that Friday evening at the President's House, I never received a reply.

For that reason I told these friends, especially Bob Prigo, Eric Nelson, and several others, that any letter to the search committee organized by me would be dead on arrival with trustees; that evening, nonetheless, I prepared a draft. Several days later I asked Eric if he would lead the effort to gather signatures, but he faced a serious health issue that required extensive consultations and knew he would not have the time.⁶ We mentioned it to several other faculty members, who thought they did not have the time or that they could not get sufficient support to warrant the effort, and this caused a delay of several weeks.

In late February, fortunately, Ellen Oxfeld, Sociology and Anthropology Department Chair, offered to gather senior faculty support as soon as possible for a letter to the search committee, and I gave her the draft I had prepared. We decided that Ellen and her colleagues would ask only full professors to sign the letter, and we would not send it unless we had at least twenty names. While Ellen was doing this, several colleagues proposed wording changes, and we realized that if we accepted any we would have to go back to those who already had signed the letter for approval. It would have added another delay.⁷

We knew that time was important, especially since during this period Ron returned to Middlebury briefly and was in Old Chapel on Monday, March 8; that evening he attended a dinner for the search committee at the President's House. We wondered if this was an official campus visit.

Ellen, while talking with faculty members, had some "rejections." "They all have their reasons (because academics are very good at finding reasons), but I personally think

⁶ TBJ to Eric Nelson and reply, Feb. 23, 2004.

⁷ Jim Ralph told Ellen that the committee "takes opinions in writing very seriously," and essentially that "if it's not in writing, it just doesn't get considered seriously." Ralph to Oxfeld, March 10, 2004.

they just don't want to put themselves out there. . . . It doesn't look like we will get to twenty due to the timidity of our faculty. However, I'll keep trying." Soon, though, she had over twenty. Mike Olinick, commending the initiative, decided to write his own letter. "Although I agree wholeheartedly with the major point of the letter, I think an appeal for an external president should include arguments both in favor of this outcome and arguments against promoting #2 to #1."⁸ (In retrospect, I wish I had been more active helping Ellen get signatures but, at the time, I worried that it would not be good if I did so.)

The letter, addressed to Search Chair Fritz with a "cc" to the four faculty members and dated March 12, 2004, read:

We, a group of concerned full professors who have had the good fortune of teaching at Middlebury College for many years, address this statement to the Presidential Search Committee.

The Search Committee has organized a series of discussions on campus, and we have welcomed this interest in our opinions; many of us have attended these meetings and some of us have talked individually with faculty members on the Search Committee.

We believe, nonetheless, that it is essential for us to make a collective statement expressing our conviction that the College should go outside for a new President. Middlebury College's prominence, illustrated by the quality of its students, faculty, facilities, and President McCardell's leadership, makes the position extremely attractive. With the brief exception of President Light's tenure, the College has not gone outside since 1975. The circumstances of his departure made it crucial for the College at that time to make an exception to its traditional policy of appointing a President from the outside.

We, as concerned faculty, believe it would be unfortunate for the College not to take advantage of this marvelous opportunity to bring in a President from the outside. This would continue the pattern that led to the selection of Presidents Stratton, Armstrong, and Robison who, in different but vitally important ways, greatly enhanced the College's local and national reputation and provided an excellent foundation for President McCardell's outstanding achievements. For us, this is the route to continue Middlebury's leadership among elite liberal arts colleges well into the 21st century.

Twenty-five professors had signed the letter; a hard copy was sent to Chair Fritz with photocopies to the four faculty members; and Ellen gave a hard copy to the committee

⁸ Oxfeld to TBJ, March 2, 2004; Olinick to Oxfeld, March 15, 2004.

secretary in Old Chapel, Betsy Etchells, on Monday, March 15.⁹ Over three weeks later Chair Fritz, as the committee, in his words was “getting close to a decision,” replied on April 6: “The Committee is bound by the Charge presented to it by the Board of trustees and, while its stipulations are confidential, the Charge did not restrict the search to external candidates only.”¹⁰

On March 12, a Friday morning and the same day we sent the letter to Fritz, I was intrigued, surprised, and then stunned when I turned on my laptop at home. I saw an email from Bill Chafe, the Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences and Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education at Duke University--and one of the nation’s most prominent historians of 20th Century America. I had invited him to give the 31st Charles S. Grant Memorial Lecture when I had seen him at the birthday party he had organized in New York City for his and my Ph.D. adviser at Columbia. Bill accepted, and he and his wife Lorna had spent several days in Middlebury in October, 2003. John and Bonnie McCardell gave a delightful luncheon for them at 3 South Street; that afternoon Bill met with several History students writing their senior theses; and before the lecture that evening he had an opportunity to meet at the Grant Committee’s dinner several members of the department and other colleagues. Following his talk a dozen friends joined us at my home.

“I am writing to ask you a favor that is of a rather delicate nature,” he began. “As you may know [I did not], I have applied for the Middlebury presidency. I think there is a good match here, and I try to speak to that in the letter of application I have sent (see attachment). There are also letters in the file from a former trustee, Nan Keohane, our outgoing president, and Keith Brodie, her predecessor.”

Then, the jolt. “I have heard nothing from the search firm since my letter of nearly two months ago. I know some of the people who have been interviewed. I am somewhat surprised to not have heard anything, especially given the areas of common concern I share with Middlebury, and my ability as a fund-raiser (\$418 million over the course of my deanship). What is not part of the file is that I was one of three finalists for the Brown presidency [the job went to Ruth Simmons, an eminent African American educator and the president of Smith College], and a finalist for the Williams presidency, where I

⁹ Concerned Professors to Frederick Fritz, March 12, 2004; Oxfeld to Etchells and to TBJ, March 16, 2004. A photocopy of the letter with the signatures is attached. Professor Emeritus Robert Ferm wrote me: “Thanks very much for sending this letter. I respect all of you for making a voice in this crucial matter for Midd. College. We have had 200 years and this is a most important chance to make a difference and lead into the future. I hope you are heard and respected for the courage you all have shown.” Ferm to TBJ, March 11, 2004.

¹⁰ Fritz to Oxfeld. April 6, 2004; TBJ to Chafe, April 8, 2004.

believe I would have gotten the offer had I not withdrawn at the last minute because of some concerns Lorna had (which she does not have about Middlebury).”

Continuing, Chafe wrote: “In any event I am puzzled. I can envision two possible reasons for the lack of contact.” One was age. “I just turned 62 . . . although it does not take into account energy level.” The second was that “I have not had a good relationship with ATKearney, and I worry that the waters might have been poisoned because of that. If age were the issue, I can understand. If not, I remained confused.” He concluded: “I thought that in confidence you could check out some of this with Jim Ralph [he had met Jim when in Middlebury for the Grant lecture] or anyone else you thought appropriate. I would also appreciate it if you conclude this is not a good idea.”¹¹

I immediately wrote a handwritten note to Jim in “strict confidence,” saying I had received overnight an email “from someone who has applied for the presidency. He said-- ‘in confidence’--I could share it with you. . . . If you would rather not see the email & application letter, I understand.” I went to campus; Jim was in his office, which was next to mine, and I gave him my letter and, then, shared Bill’s email with him. Jim told me that he had recommended Bill at the outset and heard nothing. That afternoon I asked Bill “Is it OK for him [Jim] to proceed as he sees fit?” He replied: “Yes, . . . but I would not want him to share the comments on the search firm with the rest of the committee unless he felt it was the thing to do.” Meanwhile, following Jim’s suggestion, I started drafting a letter of recommendation for the committee.¹²

Several days later Bill called, and we had a long conversation. In January, before applying, he had telephoned Peter Decker ‘57, a former Middlebury trustee who earlier had been an assistant in Old Chapel for President James Armstrong for a couple of years before attending Columbia University for a Ph.D. in History. There Peter had met Bill, as well as John Spencer. Bill asked Peter what he knew about the search, and Peter called John to find out if there were a strong inside candidate for the presidency. John had replied: “No.” Bill then sent his application to the search firm and Peter, a former member of the Colorado Commission of Higher Education, wrote a recommendation. During my conversation with Bill I mentioned the letter we had just sent from the professors, and I emailed it to him.¹³ Afterwards, I told Jim about the call, writing: “He has done thoroughly his homework from the college’s finances to candidates interviewed in Boston and an inside candidate on leave. Does believe that he could provide the financial and academic leadership for the college.” Bill told me a few days later: “If anyone wished to ‘check out’ the situation as it existed with Williams in 1999-2000, they

¹¹ Chafe’s email to TBJ, March 12, 2004, attaching his application letter to Susan Van Gilder, A.T. Kearney Educational Practice, January 18, 2004, are attached.

¹² Chafe to TBJ, March 12, 2004; TBJ to Ralph, March 12, 2004; TBJ to Chafe, March 12, 2004; Chafe to TBJ, March 13, 2004; and TBJ to Ralph, Search Committee, March 18, 2004. “I heard only a few days ago,” I wrote, “that Bill Chafe is a candidate for the presidency of Middlebury College, . . .” Letter attached. The committee never acknowledged my letter of recommendation for Bill Chafe.

¹³ Chafe telephone call to TBJ, and TBJ telephone conversation with Decker.

could call the then chair of the trustees and head of the search committee, Raymond Henze. He is a lawyer in NYC.”¹⁴

I was in Boston, as was Bill, on Saturday, March 27, for the Organization of American Historians annual meeting, but we missed seeing each other. The next day Bill wrote: “I have not heard a word, which leads me to think I probably won’t. I’m still somewhat mystified.” Ironically, the search committee interviewed candidates in Boston that Sunday.

Several days later Bill wrote, with a “cc” to Peter Decker, “Incidentally, the head of the search firm, Shelly Storbeck, called my office and is trying to set up a phone appointment, which I suspect is simply her explanation for why there has been no contact.” And, quite possibly, she did so because of the mid-March “revival” of his candidacy that had been buried. But, before any conversation, on April 5 Storbeck sent Chafe the following: “On behalf” of the search committee “I want to thank you for your willingness to allow the Committee to consider you as a candidate in its search, and for your patience in awaiting a response. . . . I must regretfully inform you that your candidacy is no longer under consideration by the Committee. . . . We are grateful for your interest in Middlebury College.” When I received that email, I could only reply that it “is an embarrassing and inadequate response to an application mailed some eleven weeks ago.”¹⁵ What else could I say?

“I just had a totally uninformative conversation with Shelly Storbeck,” Bill wrote the next noon. “She said there had ‘been hardly any conversation’ by the search committee about my candidacy, that they had zeroed in right away on people whose experience was primarily with the liberal arts (then, recognizing that this is exactly where I’ve been for nine years, added ‘in small colleges’) and said that from the beginning they had been focusing on one or two candidates. Of course, I knew that they had invited my Dean of Humanities and Social Sciences to an interview in Boston—this is Karla Holloway, an African American English scholar who is terrific. She went, and then said she was not interested, recommending instead that they look at me. So I am not impressed by Shelley’s candor or much else. But I do appreciate all that each of you did to help out, and I hope that the choice they make is a great one.”¹⁶ Former Trustee Decker wrote me: “Yes, I too am disappointed, if not maddened, by the trustees’ search process. Bill Chafe deserved better treatment . . . at least the courtesy of an interview.”

¹⁴ TBJ to Ralph, March 16, 2004; Chafe to TBJ, March 20, 2004. When I told Ellen Oxfeld about Chafe’s application and credentials--and no acknowledgment—she replied: “This is just shocking. . . . I am just amazed that someone like that would not be contacted for an interview.” Later, she added: “This really does sound incredible . . . such a person would give Middlebury so much prestige.” TBJ to Oxfeld, March 20 and 21, 2004; Oxfeld to TBJ, March 21 and 21, 2004.

¹⁵ Chafe to TBJ, with “cc” to Decker, April 2, 2004; Storbeck to Chafe, April 5, 2004, and forwarded to TBJ, April 5, 2004; TBJ to Chafe, April 5, 2004. Bill replied that evening: “Thanks, Travis. Your support has meant a great deal to me.”

¹⁶ Chafe to TBJ and Decker, April 6, 2006. I informed Jim about Shelley’s call and that “being uninformative put her foot in her mouth a couple of times, including about Karla Holloway.” TBJ to Ralph, April 6, 2006. Decker to TBJ, April 11, 2004. Holloway presently (2012) is James B. Duke Professor of English, Professor of Law and Professor of Women’s Studies at Duke.

On March 29, according to the College's homepage, the search committee met to "establish a timetable and due diligence requirements for the last phase of the search," A few days later Fritz stated that the committee was "getting close to a decision." Rumors spread amid speculations, and *The Middlebury Campus* on April 8 reported: "As A Decision Nears . . . Faculty members decry fault lines in presidential search process." The article began:

Over 20 senior members of the faculty submitted a letter to the Presidential Search Committee in mid-March recommending that President McCardell's successor be chosen from outside the College, according to a member of the administration.¹⁷

This upset us. The faculty had been told that material sent to the committee was confidential; some of the names on our petition were widely known on campus and we had not submitted to the committee an "anonymous" letter. We deliberately had not made a political statement to the community--if we had wanted "to go public," we would have. (We did not know who the source was--or whether the person told the paper or gave the letter to the paper--though one signatory had a position in the administration but not an office in Old Chapel.) We were, moreover, accused of being "anti-Ron." Was it the same "member of the administration--the *Campus* did not indicate--who said: "The faculty has expressed on numerous occasions the concern that the next president be someone who is committed to academics--someone for whom Middlebury is first and foremost an educational institution. This is code for not Ron." The next *Campus* printed a handful of letters sharply critical of us. I immediately wrote Jim Ralph: "The so-called petition was not anti-Ron (indeed, I could add a number of names to the list IF IT HAD BEEN anti-Ron) yet we are guilty by association because of loose information. And it hurts; moreover, it challenges the integrity of particularly a few of us." The article noted that Liebowitz "is the only known candidate." It included comments from search committee members Larry Yarbrough and Jim Ralph, and it discussed campus views ranging from arguments for an outside candidate and the suspicion of outsiders, after the brief presidency of Tim Light, to the strong support for Ron's candidacy.¹⁸

The article, unfortunately, far too often had used the phrases "a member of the administration" and "a senior member of the faculty" without indicating whether it had been the same administrator or the same senior faculty person. And lost in the *Campus*, with faculty letters sharply critical of our letter to the search committee as well as those endorsing Ron, was the well-reasoned statement by Ellen Oxfeld: "Regardless of who would be chosen for this position, it is important that the entire College community understand the nature of the competition among the top candidates. Certainly there must

¹⁷ *The Middlebury Campus*, April 8, 2004. The faculty member probably was Michael Katz, Dean of Language Schools and Schools Abroad and Professor of Russian. Ellen and I saw no point in asking Michael at the time, nor have we since then.

¹⁸ *Campus*, April 8 and 15, 2004; TBJ to Ralph April 15, 2004. It was known that some junior faculty members were reluctant to express their opinions, since three of the faculty on the search committee were on the Promotions Committee. They were Rifelj, Coish, and Yarbrough.

be many strong candidates for this job, and I think the campus community is entitled to see who the top ones are.”¹⁹

In a conversation with Jim about the *Campus* article and our now controversial letter, Jim said some on the committee thought that the letter was sudden and came late. He asked if I had talked with Larry who, I gathered, had been told about the letter before it was sent. I wrote Larry, saying if he wanted to talk about the letter’s origins, to let me know.²⁰

When he came to my office, I told him about the December conversations, the efforts to organize names following my return from Tunis and why I should not do it and, also, reasons for the delay. Since Larry’s reactions can be hard to read, I did not know if this made any sense. When I mentioned the interviewing of candidates in Boston, he interrupted to say “New York.” I replied: “Larry, I know you interviewed candidates in Boston on Sunday, March 28, and that you saw Karla Holloway,” and he almost fell off his chair. I added that she had sent an email to Susan Van Gilder a few days later to remove her name from the search. Holloway had, moreover, in her communication specifically recommended Bill Chafe’s candidacy. Larry was dumbstruck and remained silent for a few moments. He then asked if I was sure and, when I replied “Yes,” he admitted the committee had not been informed of that!²¹ After we talked, I wrote Larry a letter, with a “cc” to Jim. “This lack of information, which the Committee should have received, kept Chafe’s candidacy dormant.” I asked: “Thus, the question. Who deliberately withheld this information from you and the Search Committee? Was it A.T. Kearney? Or did the search firm notify Middlebury and someone here withheld it from you and your colleagues? Even though it is now irrelevant, it does not diminish the importance, the seriousness, of the question.” Larry never replied, and none of this made any difference.²²

The next day, April 16, the announcement came to a packed Mead Chapel. Although some of us had assumed the result from when we heard John McCardell’s resignation and Liebowitz’s leave, that sense of hope against all odds was quickly dispelled when my History colleague Paul Monod and I arrived and saw Ron and his wife in the front row. That evening John Spencer, who had been sitting in the row behind McCardell and Liebowitz, was back home on Long Island and called. He had noticed, he said, I had not jumped up on Fritz’s announcement (he could not have seen me in the last row); I replied that we had known this since November and that Paul and I had ordered a martini downtown, probably before Ron finished his first paragraph. John did say that he had “no way to explain away the Chafe issue.” Former Middlebury trustee Decker wrote: “Thanks for the news, which does not surprise me. I too wish the new president had come

¹⁹ *Campus*, April 15, 2004.

²⁰ TBJ to Yarbrough, April 14, 2004.

²¹ Holloway to Van Gilder in Chafe’s possession, Chafe to TBJ, April 19, 2004.

²² TBJ to Yarbrough, April 19, 2004, copy attached; TBJ to Chafe, April 21, 2004. I do not know when the committee officially made its recommendation to the Board of Trustees, or when and how the full Board--by conference call or at a meeting--made its decision.

from the outside.”²³ Six days later Shelley Storbeck sent Chafe the official announcement and thanked him for “your participation in the College’s presidential search. The committee was pleased to get to know you. . . .” Bill thought I’d like the “pleased to get to know you” line.²⁴

I and other faculty members had assumed all along that Ron was John McCardell’s handpicked successor. When John was back in town for a few days in January, 2005, we had dinner on the 24th. It was a cold, wintery night, and we sat in the back of the dining room at Two Brothers Tavern. While were talking about the college he suddenly changed the subject and asked why had Ellen organized the letter to the search committee. “Well,” I said, “because of the Commons letter,” and I do not know if he noticed that I gulped. I had sworn that I would never mention that subject to John. I had, after all, crossed him badly. (John and Bonnie gave a lovely retirement dinner at 3 South Street for John Spencer in 1998. I was sitting next to Ron. When someone across the table mentioned the Commons Ron turned to me and with a cutting tone said: “I’ve never seen anyone get away with that with John!”) Our close friendship was badly strained for two or three years, and that whole issue raced through my mind as I realized what I had said. Catching my breath, I mentioned I had done a lot of work on the letter for the search committee. I had believed, however, that the trustees would dismiss anything with my name at the top. John said that that was too bad, because the letter would have carried much more weight.

While still taken aback by opening up a subject with John that I had long avoided, I was startled by what I was inferring from John’s comment—a comment that led to a very frank discussion. He asked if I had heard about Ron and Colgate; I said “yes.” He told me that Washington and Lee, his undergraduate college, was also searching for a president during 2001-2002, and that he and Ron had agreed that each would withdraw from any consideration.²⁵ Then, with a tone and a sharpness I’ll never forget, he said: “And one did and one didn’t!” John, after all, had made a three-year commitment to the Middlebury trustees. Ron, meanwhile, kept his candidacy; although Colgate had not offered the presidency to Ron, Middlebury trustees worried about losing him. I had been wrong in my assumptions during the fall of 2002. The Middlebury trustees, or several prominent ones, as the Colby search committee had heard, wanted Ron. John emphasized

²³ TBJ to Ferm, April 17, 2004; TBJ to Decker, April 18, 2004. In May John Spencer and I had lunch when he was in town for a trustees’ meeting. He advised me to be quiet about the subject of Bill Chafe and drop it. He asserted that they knew he wasn’t right for Middlebury. I did not ask if he was telling me this on his own. I did, though, remind John that Decker, a former Middlebury trustee, had called him and then recommended Bill. I added, regardless of the committee’s refusal to give Bill more than a cursory look, Shelly’s obvious discomfort with Bill, and Bill’s concern that he had not had a good relationship with Shelly’s firm, his treatment was embarrassing for Middlebury College.

²⁴ Storbeck to Chafe, April 22, 2004, forwarded to TBJ that evening with his comment. Decker to TBJ, April 17, 2004. On January 5, 2007, Bill and I had a long talk at the American Historical Association annual meeting in Atlanta.

²⁵ The Washington and Lee president had died in July, 2001, and the Colgate president had resigned suddenly that month, and both schools simultaneously launched searches that fall for a president.

during our conversation that evening that the Board had been most generous financially and had given him an extra year. Bonnie, he mentioned, had taken what had happened harder than he had.

As the conversation continued, more and more pieces fell into place. Ron had broken a major promise and gained, in the process, the Middlebury presidency. The College had John's successor, and John announced his retirement in November, 2003. The Trustees, meanwhile, had to plan a sham search; they just could not announce Ron without a search--it was a far different situation than in 1991, when the Board suddenly fired Tim Light and John became Acting President.²⁶ It would be, thus, interesting to read the Board's Charge to the search firm; it would have been unethical, if not illegal, for A. T. Kearney Education Practice to blackball a candidate on its own. Regardless, the College spent hundreds of thousands of dollars for the search firm and inviting candidates to New York and Boston. It wasted not only the time of the candidates but also that of the faculty members on the search committee. Quite possibly Bill Chafe would have been too, too much of an outside candidate and too strong and liberal a president for the Board²⁷; in any event, the search firm and some Trustees did not know how to handle his candidacy. They never acknowledged his application; undoubtedly, they presumed no one in Middlebury would know about it. While many of us at the time believed the search was not honest, Ron would have been better served if he had become president after an open search.

On Thanksgiving, 2009, John and Bonnie invited me for dinner--the previous weekend I had attended their elder son's wedding in Columbia, SC. Halfway through the meal John suddenly asked me: "Should I apply for the presidency of Sewanee?" I immediately said "Yes!" I thought it would be good for both of them, as much as they loved Middlebury and had contributed to the entire community. He told me that Sewanee had approached him during the summer, and he had replied he was not interested; in mid-November they had come back to him. They had a good candidate but still hoped he would apply; time, though, was short as they had the charge to make a recommendation to the trustees before Christmas for action by the Board in early January. If John were interested, he and Bonnie would be invited to the campus in early December. As we talked, and from what I

²⁶ The Board gave John a two-year contract. During the spring of 1992 several faculty members, who'll remain nameless, suggested that the College should launch a national search and that, if John were the strongest candidate, he would get the position. They knew that in a national search you can usually find, for one reason or another, someone else. One or two of them conveniently forgot this argument in 2003-2004 when they supported the internal candidate.

²⁷ On June 22, 2005, the administration called an open meeting of the faculty and staff in Dana Auditorium to discuss the proposal, which the faculty opposed, to buy the Monterey Institute of International Studies. I found it interesting that Board Chair Rick Fritz spoke for some ten minutes before introducing President Liebowitz. Later, I mentioned this to John, and he subsequently told Ron that he should not let that happen again.

knew about Sewanee and John, and Bonnie and John, I believed it would be an excellent fit for them and the university.

I asked if the contract would be of reasonable length, as he would be 61 on assuming the presidency, if he would face a capital campaign soon, and if he would have an opportunity to teach a course. He answered yes to the first question, adding that they recently had finished a fund drive and he would be able to teach. I also asked what their sons, who had grown up in Middlebury, thought, and it was positive. I reminded John that when he resigned the Middlebury presidency we were told that he would play a role in raising funds for the College--and that during the past five years he never had been asked to do so, in spite of or probably because of his enormous popularity with Midd alums. At one point, I turned toward Bonnie and tried to mimic, without success, John's "And one did and one didn't"; John, quickly and emphatically, repeated the phrase. Our conversation ranged all over the place. We discussed his two course teaching load that fall--his courses had been over-subscribed, and he probably had the heaviest load in the department--and that he had not been welcomed at department meetings since 2004. While John was clearing the table, Bonnie talked about Sewanee and stated that John was too energetic to sit at a desk and write all day. John already asked if I would be a referee for his candidacy. Both John and Bonnie, without a doubt in my mind, were ready for a new and exciting challenge.

Before leaving I suggested that John not mention Sewanee to anyone in town; if he applied--which he was going to do--and did not get it, it would please immensely his detractors. A week later I drove Hank Prickitt, one of their best friends over to their house for dinner--Fran was in the hospital--and nothing was mentioned; in January telling Fran and Hank about going to Sewanee was one of the toughest things for Bonnie and John. They visited the campus in December. On December 14 I received an email from Professor Scott Wilson: would I be available for a telephone interview the next morning, since the committee had to make a decision that week?²⁸ That evening, as I thought about what I would say, I realized that I was recommending a job far away for my closest personal and professional friend and his wife for over thirty years.

The telephone interview had a nice, relaxed start. John, I asserted, would be a strong and energetic leader who would demonstrate his fund-raising abilities. He would, moreover, be an advocate for the faculty. He had completed a successful campaign for Middlebury's Bicentennial, and it was a good time to step down. Soon, I felt comfortable in saying that John, in many respects, since retiring had been an embarrassment to the College and department. Quickly, I explained what I meant. The College could not ask him to raise money at alumni events, since he was so much more popular with the alumni than the president and the alums would come and want to talk with him. The History

²⁸ The other referees from Middlebury were former Dean of Student Affairs, Ann Hanson, and Betsy Etchells, Executive Assistant to the President and Secretary of the Corporation under John and into Ron's presidency until 2009 (?). As far as I know, only the three of us in Middlebury knew about John's application for the Sewanee presidency; after Sewanee's Board of Regents offered the position to John, which would not be official until the full Board met in early January, John told Churchill Franklin and Ron. And it remained a well-kept secret in Middlebury until the announcement.

Department, moreover, had not invited him to meetings, perhaps because he was such a popular and excellent teacher and adviser, as well as a very persuasive colleague at meetings. I emphasized that Bonnie and John were highly valued and respected members of the local community, something that appeared of little interest for their successors, and that Bonnie would play a very positive role in the Sewanee community. I thought that it was a good conversation. John accepted the offer before Christmas, though the decision remained confidential until the full Board met in early January. Only a few people had known about his decision when the news broke in Middlebury. The announcement stunned their many friends in Middlebury, and the community realized it would suffer a loss with John and Bonnie's departure.

John became Vice-Chancellor, or President, of the University of the South, Sewanee, on July 1, 2010, and I had the pleasure of representing my graduate school, Columbia University, at his Installation on October 12th.²⁹

²⁹ The Chancellor is the Chair of the Board of Trustees.

Appendices

- 1) Letter from Concerned Full Professor to Frederick M. Fritz, Chair, Presidential Search Committee, with signatures, March 12, 2004
- 2) Reply from Chair Fritz to Ellen Oxfeld, April 6, 2004
- 3) William H. Chafe email to Jacobs, March 12, 2004
- 4) Attachment sent by Chafe: Chafe letter to Susan Van Gilder, Applying for the Middlebury presidency, January 18, 2004
- 5) Jacobs to Jim Ralph, Search Committee, Letter of Recommendation for Bill Chafe, March 18, 2004
- 6) Jacobs letter to Larry Yarbrough, Search Committee member, with "cc" to Jim Ralph, April 19, 2004



MIDDLEBURY COLLEGE

MIDDLEBURY, VERMONT 05753

Department of History
Telephone: (802) 443-5312

April 19, 2004

Dear Larry:

Last Thursday we talked and you stressed that the Search Committee had taken seriously the letter from 25 full professors.

During our conversation I mentioned Bill Chafe. I said that when Karla Holloway stated, after her interview in Boston in mid-February, that she was not interested in pursuing her candidacy, she had added that she recommended Bill Chafe. You were startled, and you asked me to repeat what I had said. When I did, you stated that as a member of the Search Committee you had not received this information. (Holloway sent an email to Susan Van Gilder within a week of her Boston interview.)

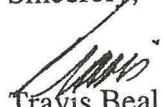
I believe you. Since talking with you, I have received confirmation that you undoubtedly did not know. This lack of information, which the Search Committee should have received, kept Chafe's candidacy dormant.

Thus, the question. Who deliberately withheld this information from you and the Search Committee? Was it A.T.Kearney? Or did the search firm notify Middlebury and someone here withhold it from you and your colleagues? Even though it is now irrelevant, it does not diminish the importance, the seriousness, of the issue.

As you may well know, Chafe applied with a letter in mid-January. Not until April 5, 2004, did he receive a reply, and that was a form email message ("I must regretfully inform you....") from Shelly Weiss Storbeck.

With my regards,

Sincerely,


Travis Beal Jacobs
Fletcher D. Proctor Professor
of American History

cc: Professor James Ralph



MIDDLEBURY COLLEGE

MIDDLEBURY, VERMONT 05753

March 12, 2004

Frederick M. Fritz, Chair
Presidential Search Committee
Ridge Road,
Cornwall, Vermont 05753

Dear Mr. Fritz:

We, a group of concerned full professors who have had the good fortune of teaching at Middlebury College for many years, address this statement to the Presidential Search Committee.

The Search Committee has organized a series of discussions on campus, and we have welcomed this interest in our opinions; many of us have attended these meetings and some of us have talked individually with faculty members on the Search Committee.


We believe, nonetheless, that it is essential for us to make a collective statement expressing our conviction that the College should go outside for a new President. Middlebury College's prominence, illustrated by the quality of its students, faculty, facilities, and President John McCardell's leadership, makes the position extremely attractive. With the brief exception of President Light's tenure, the College has not gone outside since 1975. The circumstances of his departure made it crucial for the College at that time to make an exception to its traditional policy of appointing a President from the outside.

We, as concerned faculty, believe it would be unfortunate for the College not to take advantage of this marvelous opportunity to bring in a President from the outside. This would continue the pattern that led to the selection of Presidents Stratton, Armstrong, and

Robison who, in different but vitally important ways, greatly enhanced the College's local and national reputation and provided an excellent foundation for President McCardell's outstanding achievements. For us, this is the route to continue Middlebury's leadership among elite liberal arts colleges well into the 21st century.

Sincerely,

Ellen Offord
Sandra Choi


Andrew Springg


Tanner Mayan
Kamakshi Muth
Ken Chell

Seamus

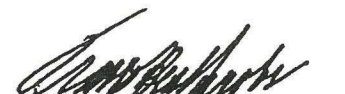
Ardonna

Cc: Ray Coish
Jim Ralph
Carol Riflej
Larry Yarbrough

Paul Mornel
Bethany Ladimer
Jeff Byne
Elizabeth Endicott

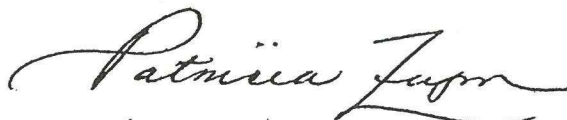
Obono M. Root
Michael R. 

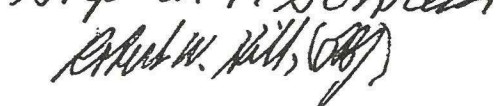

NANCY O'Connor (by email
from FRANCE)


Neil L. Waters

Margaret Dels

Cotes Baldridge


Patricia Zupin

Stephen F. Sontinen


Letter Signers

Chela Andreu-Sprigg, Professor of Spanish
Cates Baldrige, Professor of English
Jeff Byers, Professor of Chemistry and Biochemistry
Sunhee Choi, Professor of Chemistry and Biochemistry
Bob Churchill, Professor of Geography
Dave Dorman, Professor of Mathematics
Tina Endicott, Professor of History
Bob Hill, Professor of English
Travis Jacobs, Professor of History
Michael Katz, Professor of Russian; Dean of Language Schools and Schools Abroad
Bethany Ladimer, Professor of French
Jim Larrabee, Professor of Chemistry and Biochemistry
Timi Mayer, Professor of Geography
Paul Monod, Professor of History
Kevin Moss, Professor of Russian
Kamakshi Murti, Professor of German
Eric Nelson, Professor of Studio Art
Peggy Nelson, Professor of Sociology and Anthropology
Nancy O'Connor, Professor of French
Ellen Oxfeld, Professor of Sociology and Anthropology
Bob Prigo, Professor of Physics; Director, Program in Teacher Education
Tom Root, Professor of Biology
Steve Sontum, Professor of Chemistry and Biochemistry
Neil Waters, Professor of History
Patricia Zupan, Professor of Spanish



MIDDLEBURY COLLEGE

MIDDLEBURY, VERMONT 05753

April 6, 2004

c/o Ellen Oxfield
Munroe Hall 204

Dear Faculty Signatories to Letter of March 12,

Thank you for your letter. The Presidential Search Committee stands extremely grateful for your professional devotion to Middlebury College and your keen interest in promoting its continued excellence. We discussed your letter and recommendation, a sentiment we also heard from some at campus discussions in December/early January as well as feedback, which was clearly conveyed by the faculty Search Committee members.

The Committee is bound by the Charge presented to it by the Board of Trustees and, while its stipulations are confidential, the Charge did not restrict the search to external candidates only.

We are substantially down the road in our search process, which has been diverse, national and rigorous. I am confident the Board of Trustees, responding to our recommendation, will choose an outstanding 16th President of Middlebury College who, with your support, will add to our already strong momentum among leading liberal arts colleges.

Sincerely,

Frederick M. Fritz, Chair
Search Committee


 Reply
  Reply to all
  Forward
 




 Close

[Help](#)

From: William H. Chafe [chafe@asdean.duke.edu] Sent: Fri 3/12/2004 3:16 AM
 To: Jacobs, Travis
 Cc:
 Subject: a favor

Attachments:  Attachments may contain viruses that are harmful to your computer. Attachments may not display correctly.

 [middlebury.wpd\(12KB\)](#)

[View As Web Page](#)

Hi Travis,

I am writing to ask a favor that is of a rather delicate nature. As you may know, I have applied for the Middlebury presidency. I think there is a good match here, and I try to speak to that in the letter of application I have sent (see attachment). There are also letters in the file from a former trustee, Nan Keohane, our outgoing president, and Keith Brodie, her predecessor.

I have heard nothing from the search firm since my letter of nearly two months ago. I know some of the people who have been interviewed. I am somewhat surprised to not have heard anything, especially given the areas of common concern I share with Middlebury, and my ability as a fund-raiser (418 million over the course of my deanship). What is not part of the file is that I was one of three finalists for the Brown presidency, and a finalist for the Williams presidency, where I believe I would have gotten the offer had I not withdrawn at the last minute because of some concerns Lorna had (which she does not have about Middlebury).

In any event, I am puzzled. I can envision two possible reasons for the lack of contact. One of these is my age -- I just turned 62 -- and some might believe that is too old (although it does not take into account energy level). The other is the fact that I have not had a good relationship with ATKearney, and I worry that the waters may have been poisoned because of that. If age were the issue, I can understand. If not, I remain confused.

I thought that in confidence you could check out some of this with Jim Ralph or anyone else you thought appropriate. I will also appreciate it if you conclude this is not a good idea.


Thanks for considering my request. I'm in South Africa looking at another society confronting some of the same dilemmas of race and class as ours, and it's fascinating. I come back on Sunday.

Cheers,

Bill

William H. Chafe
 Dean of the Faculty of Arts & Sciences
 and Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education

<< [middlebury.wpd](#) >>



January 18, 2004

Susan Van Gilder
A.T. Kearney Educational Practice
333 John Carlyle St.
Alexandria, Virginia 22314

Dear Susan,

I am pleased to confirm my interest in being considered. for the presidency of Middlebury College.

This past fall, I had the pleasure of delivering the Charles Grant Memorial Lecture at Middlebury. It was a wonderful experience that included exciting interactions with students, faculty and administrators. Although I had no idea then that John McCardell would be stepping down as president, I recall thinking that this would be a wonderful place to teach and serve. Now, reading through the statement you have circulated about the position, I am struck further by the degree to which my passions and priorities over the course of my career reflect to a significant degree those that have guided Middlebury's development.

Let me list briefly some of these areas of shared commitment.

As Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, I led the effort to create Curriculum 2000, a major curriculum reform that reinstated a foreign language requirement, enriched and deepened our writing program, created requirements in cross-cultural studies and ethical inquiry, mandated that every student complete basic courses in all the liberal arts, and introduced new requirements for undergraduate research experiences. I also initiated a task force on service-based learning that has launched an enormously successful cluster of courses tied to community service, both in Durham and abroad.

I chaired an undergraduate admissions task force designed to sharpen and strengthen our intellectual message to potential applicants. As a result of the work of that group, we introduced "intellectual vitality" as an added criteria for assessing our applicants – on top of GPA, SAT scores, rigor of curriculum, recommendations, extra-curricular activities, and student essays – in order to focus more on edge and creativity in our students. During my time as Vice-Provost for Undergraduate Education, our applicant pool has increased by more than 3,000 to 17,000, with a steadily increasing quality among our matriculants (their average SAT score is now 1400).

Throughout this period, diversity among students and faculty has been a key priority, for me and for Duke. During my term as Dean, the percentage of students of color in the student body has increased from 25 to 35 (11% African American, 15 % Asian American, 9 % Latino). We have also concentrated on recruiting minority faculty through our Black Faculty Strategic Initiative; as a result, the number of African American faculty in Arts and Sciences has grown from 17 to 39 (or nearly 133 percent) during my tenure.

Consistent with this concern about diversity, I led the effort to reform our residential life policies to make them more hospitable to people of different backgrounds. Before last year, fraternities and selective houses dominated the social life on our main, upper class (West) campus, and one third of all sophomores – all independents and disproportionately students of color – lived in housing removed from West. Seeking to build on the wonderful success of having all first year students live on East campus (the former Women's College), where students from all regions and backgrounds lived together and came to know each other, we proposed and implemented a policy requiring that starting in 2002, all sophomores would live on upper-class West campus. We built a new dormitory to accommodate the students, and we removed selectives and fraternities from the main corridor on West in order to make that campus more hospitable to women and minorities. I believe that no college issue is more important than campus climate, especially the ways that residential life policies embody an institution's values. I am proud that the changes we brought about at Duke have created the material foundation for creating a community where diversity is a substantive reality as well as a demographic statistic.

In keeping with Duke's commitment to interdisciplinarity as its intellectual signature, I helped create the John Hope Franklin Center for Interdisciplinary and International Studies – an incubator for new research and curricular programs in the humanities and interpretive social sciences – and this year, we created as well a new Social Science Research Institute which is designed to generate cross-disciplinary initiatives among the more quantitative social sciences. We have launched major new programs in genomics and nanoscience. I have worked hard to make our Public Policy department a national leader, and have helped create their research and teaching programs in Child and Family Policy, and Genome Ethics, Law and Policy.

In all of this I have had the honor of directing a team of superb deans and assistants – four full deans, and five associate deans. We work together to develop and implement visions for creating centers of excellence. Our goal is to make positive change happen, not manage the status quo. During my time in office, I have successfully managed an annual budget of more than \$220 million. I have also spearheaded a fund-raising campaign where I have supervised and worked closely with a full-time development staff of five. As part of the overall Campaign for Duke, I have spent 20 % of my time on the road with parents and alumni, and we have raised for Arts and Sciences a total of \$418 million, with the largest sums devoted to financial aid endowment and faculty support.

Let me stop there. I believe that Middlebury embodies the innovative attitudes and value priorities that have made my years of service in the Duke administration so rewarding. I would love to have a chance to talk more with you about these and other issues, and look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

William H. Chafe



MIDDLEBURY COLLEGE

MIDDLEBURY, VERMONT 05753

Department of History
Telephone: (802) 443-5312

March 18, 2004

Professor Jim Ralph
Presidential Search Committee

Re: William H. Chafe

Dear Jim:

I heard only a few days ago that Bill Chafe is a candidate for the presidency of Middlebury College, and I am delighted to write this recommendation. He is a prominent academic administrator and fund-raiser, and he is an excellent teacher and scholar.

I had met Bill briefly over the years and then had the opportunity to talk with him at length in New York over a year ago. At that time I asked if he would be interested in delivering the Charles S. Grant Memorial Lecture. He has written nine books, focusing especially on issues of race and gender identity, and he has established himself as one of the foremost historians of 20th Century America. He said he would be delighted to come to Middlebury, and he gave the talk during a Family Weekend last fall. And, while at Middlebury, he met with some students and had an engaging conversation with them about their projects, interests, and plans. The enclosed program for the Grant Lecture provides some additional biographical information.

More important for Middlebury College are Professor Chafe's administrative skills and fund-raising record at Duke University, one of the nation's most prominent institutions. He has served as the Dean of Faculty of Arts and Sciences since 1995 and as Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education since 1999. He led the effort for a major curriculum reform; he has played a role in increasing the quality of matriculating students and emphasized the importance of diversity among Duke's students and faculty. He has, moreover, taken the lead in reforming residential life. I find it significant that he recently returned from 10-12 days in South Africa where he was studying another society's dilemma of class and race.

During his Deanship Bill has managed the University's annual budget and raised over \$400,000,000.

Bill recently turned 62, and I do not believe that his age should weaken his candidacy for the presidency. He has terrific energy and a strong physical presence. I am

sure that the letters he has from Duke attest to his energy and commitment as well as to his proven ability for administrative and fund-raising leadership.

With his impressive credentials, his age did not prevent him, only a few years ago, from becoming a finalist for the presidency at Brown; he was, also, a finalist at Williams—he believes that he would have received the offer had he not withdrawn at the last minute; if you interview him, you can ask for his reason.

Bill Chafe has outstanding professional skills and personal characteristics, and his credentials should warrant an interview for the presidency of Middlebury College. He has the ability and the energy to provide administrative and academic leadership on campus and to earn the respect from both students and faculty, as well as from the alumni. He is a fine public speaker and in a conversation he conveys his interest, enthusiasm and commitment. He has, moreover, the essential experience as a fund-raiser; indeed, he has spent a significant part of his Deanship traveling to meet parents and alumni. In short, he could lead the College on campus and for the major fund-raising drive that must be just around the corner, and I am confident that during his presidency he would have the necessary time, energy, and determination to do so successfully.

Bill Chafe would continue and enhance Middlebury's role as one of the nation's outstanding liberal arts college.

With my regards,

Sincerely,

Travis Beal Jacobs
Fletcher D. Proctor Professor
of American History

June 18, 2024

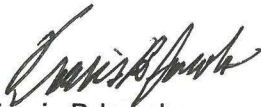
To: Special Collections

From: Travis B Jacobs

Re: "Middlebury's 2004 Presidential Search: Questionable Decisions"
June 2024, 2 copies

I attach two copies. Please put one in my folder, and place the second copy in the Special Collections folders on the College's 2004 Search or one for Liebowitz and 2004.

Thank you very much.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Travis B Jacobs", written in a cursive style.

Travis B Jacobs
Fletcher D. Proctor Professor
Emeritus of American History

Middlebury's 2004 Presidential Search:

Questionable Decisions

Travis Beal Jacobs
Fletcher D. Proctor Professor
of American History
December, 2012

A Middlebury Search

John M. McCardell, Jr., announced in Mead Chapel on Tuesday, November 18, 2003, that he would resign as the 15th President of Middlebury College on June 30, 2004, after thirteen years. He would become President Emeritus and College Professor and be on leave for the academic year, 2004-2005, before returning to the History Department to teach during the fall semesters. Trustee Frederick M. Fritz '68 would serve as Chair of the Search Committee; the Board at its meeting in New York City in early December would appoint seven other Trustees, and the selection process for seven faculty and staff members was not announced. An outside search firm [A.T. Kearney Education Practice], moreover, had already started the search process.

What follows is not a history of the presidential search based on official documents. It contains only my recollection of events, with my memory refreshed by emails on my laptop. It discusses the steps leading to the letter sent to the search committee by twenty-five full professors expressing their belief that the committee should select McCardell's successor from outside Middlebury. More important, it presents my information about the search committee's refusal to interview or to give more than a cursory consideration to an outstanding educator and scholar; indeed, it never acknowledged his application. Finally, I recall a private and relevant conversation with John McCardell in January, 2005.

When I returned from Mead Chapel to my office I had an email inviting me to a reception later that afternoon at 3 South Street, the President's House. It was a relatively small gathering of John and Bonnie's friends, as well as Fritz. John told me that the announcement had been carefully planned to occur after the College's Family and Homecoming Weekends and that the committee expected to announce the new president by April, 2004. One colleague, Robert W. Hill, Henry Norman Hudson Professor of English, told Fritz that it was very important for Middlebury College for the new president to come from the outside. Some of us learned that evening that Ron Liebowitz, Executive Vice President and Provost, was taking a Winter/Spring leave to become a candidate, and that would be announced a week later.

That evening I wrote John a short note, emphasizing that my association with him over twenty-seven years had "expanded my abilities as a historian and greatly enriched my association with Middlebury College. Thank you." I concluded, expressing "my admiration for your career and achievement in the Department and Old Chapel."

As I wrote the letter and found it difficult to focus on my class discussions in the morning on the Korean War and McCarthyism, recollections came to mind. Initially, I had not read any significance into a comment John had made to me earlier at the annual Henry Sheldon Museum dinner at the Kirk Center. He had mentioned that he and Bonnie

had just purchased a house with some fifty acres in Cornwall, outside Middlebury, and were selling the house they had owned for some fifteen years in Cornwall.

I remembered a dinner I had had in mid-June, 2002, at a Princeton classmate's home in Edgartown. His houseguests were Robert P. Youngman '64, a Middlebury Trustee (1980-1996) and former Board Chair (1993-1996), and his wife. Youngman told me that John, at first, had not impressed him, and he had asked John to prepare a statement with his vision for the College. What John then presented had, indeed, impressed him. During a discussion before dinner about the College's successful Bicentennial campaign for \$200,000,000, I mentioned that I had heard comments about an unofficial \$100,000,000 campaign underway. Youngman said "yes," noting that some of the trustees were quite concerned about the amount; he quickly added, however, that John had pledged to stay at least three years--which would be until 2004.

And I recalled two other important conversations. I had been on leave, 2001-2002, and when I returned for classes that fall several colleagues stated they had been told that Ron recently had turned down the presidency of Colgate, after being assured he would be John's successor at Middlebury. I quickly replied that, if true, it would be terribly awkward for John, especially at Trustees' Meetings; they repeated what they had said. One question, for me, was: Did the full Board know about that commitment?¹ Later that fall, I served on an outside committee reviewing the Colby College History Department. One morning over a cup of coffee I had a long, interesting conversation with the Dean of Faculty. He told me that Ron had been on the short list for the Colby presidency in 2000. While the Colby search committee had heard that Middlebury saw Ron as McCardell's successor, its first choice had been William D. Adams. He accepted and is still Colby's president.²

Continuing my rumination that evening, I wrote down, without taking time to notice the typos: "John has done a fantastic job fund-raising and promoting the college—I may not like the Commons direction and, esp. its costs, but he deserves enormous credit for his leadership." I worried that the search committee was too large, and adding the "trustees, all hand-picked, are convinced college is on the right course, doing great, and therefore no need for any changes.... So, a search with people realizing a dominant inside candidate and Ron gets it.... The ambitions of 10-15 faculty and administrators depend on Ron becoming President. Will one or two of them be on the search committee?"

¹ Two comments. Initially, I was familiar with a less awkward situation. Trinity College announced in 1965 that my father would retire as president in 1968 when he was 68; the College in 1967 appointed his successor, who would be on leave from the college, and not in Hartford, during that last year, 1967-1968. Second, I have studied carefully Columbia University's search for a successor to her world-famous president, Nicholas Murray Butler, and selection of General Dwight D. Eisenhower in *Eisenhower at Columbia* (Transaction Publishers: New Brunswick and London, 2001).

² November 18, 2002. Professor Eric Nelson recently told me that a Bowdoin College presidential search committee had interviewed Ron in late 2001 or early 2002 off-campus. He added that a committee member had told him they had concluded that Ron was too much about business and not enough about academics and scholarship. Nelson to TBJ, December 5, 2012.

Interesting. Gee, some might have to go back to full-time teaching and grading. They would much rather run the college for the next decade or so."

"Obviously," I noted, "I think going outside is necessary if the college is to continue to move forward. Except for 'one Light year,'" referring to Timothy Light, who had come to Middlebury in 1990 and was fired in 1991, "it has been 28 years since Olin [Robison] arrived. And this is not to diminish what John has accomplished (nor Ron's abilities, though I do not think he has John's strengths).... Of course, people such as me will be told that Tim Light is a good reason for not going outside when you can go inside. Yet, I doubt if any of the colleges 'with which we normally like to associate ourselves' has had two insiders in a row. But the trustees rightly have the say...."³

Before going to the reception at 3 South Street, I emailed John Spencer: "Had thought it would not happen for another year," without mentioning what Milt Peterson had told me about John's commitment to the College for three years. Spencer had joined the History Department in 1974, had served four years as Dean of the College and, upon his retirement in 1998 had become a Trustee. I wrote: "Do hope the college goes outside." John replied: "I agree that the new person (almost said 'man') should come from the outside. I've asked to be on the Search Committee, but haven't heard from Churchill [Franklin, the Board Chair] yet.... That's off the record." On December 7th I wrote: "For several reasons, more than a few believe that the search is set up for the Provost."⁴

In early December the Search Committee announced its composition which included, among others, John Spencer and four faculty members: Carol Rifelj, Larry Yarbrough, Ray Coish, and Jim Ralph.⁵ In addition to supporters for Ron Liebowitz's candidacy, many believed that a president from outside would be best for the College and among them there were faculty members who did not want Ron. I told a few friends and colleagues my belief that the College, after nearly three decades, had an excellent opportunity for a new person to lead Middlebury into the future. I added my view that little could be done beyond a number of senior faculty members expressing their opinion in a letter to the search committee. That December, however, I was preoccupied with spending January in Tunisia.

In November I had received a Fulbright Senior Specialists Fellowship to teach recent American history in Tunis. Besides grading fall term exams and papers quickly, I had to prepare what I needed for my classes at the University of La Manouba. The students were M.A. candidates in American Studies and most of them could not afford books, even if books were available at that late date. I was advised to prepare and send material for photocopying at the university. I departed on New Year's Day; teaching at the university and making friends with several Tunisians was a great experience for me.

³ TBJ, notes, Nov. 18, 2003.

⁴ TBJ to Spencer, Nov. 18, 2003; Spencer to TBJ, Dec. 2, 2003; TBJ to Spencer, Dec. 7, 2003.

⁵ The committee had eight trustees and four faculty, and the students, staff, and alumni each had a representative.

When I returned in early February on the eve of classes, a number of faculty colleagues were expressing their frustration, their sense that the Search Committee was not listening to their concern for a president from outside Middlebury; their arguments were not anti-Ron. I repeated that I really did not have any suggestions, except for possibly sending a letter to the committee from a number of senior faculty members. These colleagues were asking for my thoughts largely because they had signed in 1995 a petition, that I had organized, urging the Trustees to reconsider their endorsement of John McCardell's proposal for a Residential Commons system. That petition had evolved from discussions with two junior colleagues in the History Department whose views I respected. I drafted a memorandum and showed it to a few close friends. The memo quickly gained a life of its own, and twenty full professors, including fourteen holding endowed chairs, signed a one-page statement. I gave the petition to the trustees running two open meetings on the Commons proposal, and a colleague handed it to a trustee at a third meeting. Though the petition was discussed that Friday evening at the President's House, I never received a reply.

For that reason I told these friends, especially Bob Prigo, Eric Nelson, and several others, that any letter to the search committee organized by me would be dead on arrival with trustees; that evening, nonetheless, I prepared a draft. Several days later I asked Eric if he would lead the effort to gather signatures, but he faced a serious health issue that required extensive consultations and knew he would not have the time.⁶ We mentioned it to several other faculty members, who thought they did not have the time or that they could not get sufficient support to warrant the effort, and this caused a delay of several weeks.

In late February, fortunately, Ellen Oxfeld, Sociology and Anthropology Department Chair, offered to gather senior faculty support as soon as possible for a letter to the search committee, and I gave her the draft I had prepared. We decided that Ellen and her colleagues would ask only full professors to sign the letter, and we would not send it unless we had at least twenty names. While Ellen was doing this, several colleagues proposed wording changes, and we realized that if we accepted any we would have to go back to those who already had signed the letter for approval. It would have added another delay.⁷

We knew that time was important, especially since during this period Ron returned to Middlebury briefly and was in Old Chapel on Monday, March 8; that evening he attended a dinner for the search committee at the President's House. We wondered if this was an official campus visit.

Ellen, while talking with faculty members, had some "rejections." "They all have their reasons (because academics are very good at finding reasons), but I personally think

⁶ TBJ to Eric Nelson and reply, Feb. 23, 2004.

⁷ Jim Ralph told Ellen that the committee "takes opinions in writing very seriously," and essentially that "if it's not in writing, it just doesn't get considered seriously." Ralph to Oxfeld, March 10, 2004.

they just don't want to put themselves out there. . . . It doesn't look like we will get to twenty due to the timidity of our faculty. However, I'll keep trying." Soon, though, she had over twenty. Mike Olinick, commending the initiative, decided to write his own letter. "Although I agree wholeheartedly with the major point of the letter, I think an appeal for an external president should include arguments both in favor of this outcome and arguments against promoting #2 to #1."⁸ (In retrospect, I wish I had been more active helping Ellen get signatures but, at the time, I worried that it would not be good if I did so.)

The letter, addressed to Search Chair Fritz with a "cc" to the four faculty members and dated March 12, 2004, read:

We, a group of concerned full professors who have had the good fortune of teaching at Middlebury College for many years, address this statement to the Presidential Search Committee.

The Search Committee has organized a series of discussions on campus, and we have welcomed this interest in our opinions; many of us have attended these meetings and some of us have talked individually with faculty members on the Search Committee.

We believe, nonetheless, that it is essential for us to make a collective statement expressing our conviction that the College should go outside for a new President. Middlebury College's prominence, illustrated by the quality of its students, faculty, facilities, and President McCardell's leadership, makes the position extremely attractive. With the brief exception of President Light's tenure, the College has not gone outside since 1975. The circumstances of his departure made it crucial for the College at that time to make an exception to its traditional policy of appointing a President from the outside.

We, as concerned faculty, believe it would be unfortunate for the College not to take advantage of this marvelous opportunity to bring in a President from the outside. This would continue the pattern that led to the selection of Presidents Stratton, Armstrong, and Robison who, in different but vitally important ways, greatly enhanced the College's local and national reputation and provided an excellent foundation for President McCardell's outstanding achievements. For us, this is the route to continue Middlebury's leadership among elite liberal arts colleges well into the 21st century.

Twenty-five professors had signed the letter; a hard copy was sent to Chair Fritz with photocopies to the four faculty members; and Ellen gave a hard copy to the committee

⁸ Oxfeld to TBJ, March 2, 2004; Olinick to Oxfeld, March 15, 2004.

secretary in Old Chapel, Betsy Etchells, on Monday, March 15.⁹ Over three weeks later Chair Fritz, as the committee, in his words was “getting close to a decision,” replied on April 6: “The Committee is bound by the Charge presented to it by the Board of Trustees and, while its stipulations are confidential, the Charge did not restrict the search to external candidates only.”¹⁰

On March 12, a Friday morning and the same day we sent the letter to Fritz, I was intrigued, surprised, and then stunned when I turned on my laptop at home. I saw an email from Bill Chafe, the Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences and Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education at Duke University--and one of the nation’s most prominent historians of 20th Century America. I had invited him to give the 31st Charles S. Grant Memorial Lecture when I had seen him at the birthday party he had organized in New York City for his and my Ph.D. adviser at Columbia. Bill accepted, and he and his wife Lorna had spent several days in Middlebury in October, 2003. John and Bonnie McCardell gave a delightful luncheon for them at 3 South Street; that afternoon Bill met with several History students writing their senior theses; and before the lecture that evening he had an opportunity to meet at the Grant Committee’s dinner several members of the department and other colleagues. Following his talk a dozen friends joined us at my home.

“I am writing to ask you a favor that is of a rather delicate nature,” he began. “As you may know [I did not], I have applied for the Middlebury presidency. I think there is a good match here, and I try to speak to that in the letter of application I have sent (see attachment). There are also letters in the file from a former trustee, Nan Keohane, our outgoing president, and Keith Brodie, her predecessor.”

Then, the jolt. “I have heard nothing from the search firm since my letter of nearly two months ago. I know some of the people who have been interviewed. I am somewhat surprised to not have heard anything, especially given the areas of common concern I share with Middlebury, and my ability as a fund-raiser (\$418 million over the course of my deanship). What is not part of the file is that I was one of three finalists for the Brown presidency [the job went to Ruth Simmons, an eminent African American educator and the president of Smith College], and a finalist for the Williams presidency, where I

⁹ Concerned Professors to Frederick Fritz, March 12, 2004; Oxfeld to Etchells and to TBJ, March 16, 2004. A photocopy of the letter with the signatures is attached. Professor Emeritus Robert Ferm wrote me: “Thanks very much for sending this letter. I respect all of you for making a voice in this crucial matter for Midd. College. We have had 200 years and this is a most important chance to make a difference and lead into the future. I hope you are heard and respected for the courage you all have shown.” Ferm to TBJ, March 11, 2004.

¹⁰ Fritz to Oxfeld. April 6, 2004; TBJ to Chafe, April 8, 2004.

believe I would have gotten the offer had I not withdrawn at the last minute because of some concerns Lorna had (which she does not have about Middlebury)."

Continuing, Chafe wrote: "In any event I am puzzled. I can envision two possible reasons for the lack of contact." One was age. "I just turned 62 . . . although it does not take into account energy level." The second was that "I have not had a good relationship with ATKearney, and I worry that the waters might have been poisoned because of that. If age were the issue, I can understand. If not, I remained confused." He concluded: "I thought that in confidence you could check out some of this with Jim Ralph [he had met Jim when in Middlebury for the Grant lecture] or anyone else you thought appropriate. I would also appreciate it if you conclude this is not a good idea."¹¹

I immediately wrote a handwritten note to Jim in "strict confidence," saying I had received overnight an email "from someone who has applied for the presidency. He said-- 'in confidence' --I could share it with you. . . . If you would rather not see the email & application letter, I understand." I went to campus; Jim was in his office, which was next to mine, and I gave him my letter and, then, shared Bill's email with him. Jim told me that he had recommended Bill at the outset and heard nothing. That afternoon I asked Bill "Is it OK for him [Jim] to proceed as he sees fit?" He replied: "Yes, . . . but I would not want him to share the comments on the search firm with the rest of the committee unless he felt it was the thing to do." Meanwhile, following Jim's suggestion, I started drafting a letter of recommendation for the committee.¹²

Several days later Bill called, and we had a long conversation. In January, before applying, he had telephoned Peter Decker '57, a former Middlebury trustee who earlier had been an assistant in Old Chapel for President James Armstrong for a couple of years before attending Columbia University for a Ph.D. in History. There Peter had met Bill, as well as John Spencer. Bill asked Peter what he knew about the search, and Peter called John to find out if there were a strong inside candidate for the presidency. John had replied: "No." Bill then sent his application to the search firm and Peter, a former member of the Colorado Commission of Higher Education, wrote a recommendation. During my conversation with Bill I mentioned the letter we had just sent from the professors, and I emailed it to him.¹³ Afterwards, I told Jim about the call, writing: "He has done thoroughly his homework from the college's finances to candidates interviewed in Boston and an inside candidate on leave. Does believe that he could provide the financial and academic leadership for the college." Bill told me a few days later: "If anyone wished to 'check out' the situation as it existed with Williams in 1999-2000, they

¹¹ Chafe's email to TBJ, March 12, 2004, attaching his application letter to Susan Van Gilder, A.T. Kearney Educational Practice, January 18, 2004, are attached.

¹² Chafe to TBJ, March 12, 2004; TBJ to Ralph, March 12, 2004; TBJ to Chafe, March 12, 2004; Chafe to TBJ, March 13, 2004; and TBJ to Ralph, Search Committee, March 18, 2004. "I heard only a few days ago," I wrote, "that Bill Chafe is a candidate for the presidency of Middlebury College, . . ." Letter attached. The committee never acknowledged my letter of recommendation for Bill Chafe.

¹³ Chafe telephone call to TBJ, and TBJ telephone conversation with Decker.

could call the then chair of the trustees and head of the search committee, Raymond Henze. He is a lawyer in NYC.”¹⁴

I was in Boston, as was Bill, on Saturday, March 27, for the Organization of American Historians annual meeting, but we missed seeing each other. The next day Bill wrote: “I have not heard a word, which leads me to think I probably won’t. I’m still somewhat mystified.” Ironically, the search committee interviewed candidates in Boston that Sunday.

Several days later Bill wrote, with a “cc” to Peter Decker, “Incidentally, the head of the search firm, Shelly Storbeck, called my office and is trying to set up a phone appointment, which I suspect is simply her explanation for why there has been no contact.” And, quite possibly, she did so because of the mid-March “revival” of his candidacy that had been buried. But, before any conversation, on April 5 Storbeck sent Chafe the following: “On behalf” of the search committee “I want to thank you for your willingness to allow the Committee to consider you as a candidate in its search, and for your patience in awaiting a response. . . . I must regretfully inform you that your candidacy is no longer under consideration by the Committee. . . . We are grateful for your interest in Middlebury College.” When I received that email, I could only reply that it “is an embarrassing and inadequate response to an application mailed some eleven weeks ago.”¹⁵ What else could I say?

“I just had a totally uninformative conversation with Shelly Storbeck,” Bill wrote the next noon. “She said there had ‘been hardly any conversation’ by the search committee about my candidacy, that they had zeroed in right away on people whose experience was primarily with the liberal arts (then, recognizing that this is exactly where I’ve been for nine years, added ‘in small colleges’) and said that from the beginning they had been focusing on one or two candidates. Of course, I knew that they had invited my Dean of Humanities and Social Sciences to an interview in Boston—this is Karla Holloway, an African American English scholar who is terrific. She went, and then said she was not interested, recommending instead that they look at me. So I am not impressed by Shelley’s candor or much else. But I do appreciate all that each of you did to help out, and I hope that the choice they make is a great one.”¹⁶ Former Trustee Decker wrote me: “Yes, I too am disappointed, if not maddened, by the trustees’ search process. Bill Chafe deserved better treatment . . . at least the courtesy of an interview.”

¹⁴ TBJ to Ralph, March 16, 2004; Chafe to TBJ, March 20, 2004. When I told Ellen Oxfeld about Chafe’s application and credentials--and no acknowledgment--she replied: “This is just shocking. . . . I am just amazed that someone like that would not be contacted for an interview.” Later, she added: “This really does sound incredible . . . such a person would give Middlebury so much prestige.” TBJ to Oxfeld, March 20 and 21, 2004; Oxfeld to TBJ, March 21 and 21, 2004.

¹⁵ Chafe to TBJ, with “cc” to Decker, April 2, 2004; Storbeck to Chafe, April 5, 2004, and forwarded to TBJ, April 5, 2004; TBJ to Chafe, April 5, 2004. Bill replied that evening: “Thanks, Travis. Your support has meant a great deal to me.”

¹⁶ Chafe to TBJ and Decker, April 6, 2006. I informed Ralph about Shelley’s call and that “being uninformative put her foot in her mouth a couple of times, including about Karla Holloway.” TBJ to Ralph, April 6, 2006. Decker to TBJ, April 11, 2004. Holloway presently (2012) is James B. Duke Professor of English, Professor of Law and Professor of Women’s Studies at Duke.

On March 29, according to the College's homepage, the search committee met to "establish a timetable and due diligence requirements for the last phase of the search," A few days later Fritz stated that the committee was "getting close to a decision." Rumors spread amid speculations, and *The Middlebury Campus* on April 8 reported: "As A Decision Nears . . . Faculty members decry fault lines in presidential search process." The article began:

Over 20 senior members of the faculty submitted a letter to the Presidential Search Committee in mid-March recommending that President McCardell's successor be chosen from outside the College, according to a member of the administration.¹⁷

This upset us. The faculty had been told that material sent to the committee was confidential; some of the names on our petition were widely known on campus and we had not submitted to the committee an "anonymous" letter. We deliberately had not made a political statement to the community--if we had wanted "to go public," we would have. (We did not know who the source was--or whether the person told the paper or gave the letter to the paper--though one signatory had a position in the administration but not an office in Old Chapel.) We were, moreover, accused of being "anti-Ron." Was it the same "member of the administration--the *Campus* did not indicate--who said: "The faculty has expressed on numerous occasions the concern that the next president be someone who is committed to academics--someone for whom Middlebury is first and foremost an educational institution. This is code for not Ron." The next *Campus* printed a handful of letters sharply critical of us. I immediately wrote Jim Ralph: "The so-called petition was not anti-Ron (indeed, I could add a number of names to the list IF IT HAD BEEN anti-Ron) yet we are guilty by association because of loose information. And it hurts; moreover, it challenges the integrity of particularly a few of us." The article noted that Liebowitz "is the only known candidate." It included comments from search committee members Larry Yarbrough and Jim Ralph, and it discussed campus views ranging from arguments for an outside candidate and the suspicion of outsiders, after the brief presidency of Tim Light, to the strong support for Ron's candidacy.¹⁸

The article, unfortunately, far too often had used the phrases "a member of the administration" and "a senior member of the faculty" without indicating whether it had been the same administrator or the same senior faculty person. And lost in the *Campus*, with faculty letters sharply critical of our letter to the search committee as well as those endorsing Ron, was the well-reasoned statement by Ellen Oxfeld: "Regardless of who would be chosen for this position, it is important that the entire College community understand the nature of the competition among the top candidates. Certainly there must

¹⁷ *The Middlebury Campus*, April 8, 2004. The faculty member probably was Michael Katz, Dean of Language Schools and Schools Abroad and Professor of Russian. Ellen and I saw no point in asking Michael at the time, nor have we since then.

¹⁸ *Campus*, April 8 and 15, 2004; TBJ to Ralph April 15, 2004. It was known that some junior faculty members were reluctant to express their opinions, since three of the faculty on the search committee were on the Promotions Committee. They were Rifelj, Coish, and Yarbrough.

be many strong candidates for this job, and I think the campus community is entitled to see who the top ones are.”¹⁹

In a conversation with Jim about the *Campus* article and our now controversial letter, Jim said some on the committee thought that the letter was sudden and came late. He asked if I had talked with Larry who, I gathered, had been told about the letter before it was sent. I wrote Larry, saying if he wanted to talk about the letter’s origins, to let me know.²⁰

When he came to my office, I told him about the December conversations, the efforts to organize names following my return from Tunis and why I should not do it and, also, reasons for the delay. Since Larry’s reactions can be hard to read, I did not know if this made any sense. When I mentioned the interviewing of candidates in Boston, he interrupted to say “New York.” I replied: “Larry, I know you interviewed candidates in Boston on Sunday, March 28, and that you saw Karla Holloway,” and he almost fell off his chair. I added that she had sent an email to Susan Van Gilder a few days later to remove her name from the search. Holloway had, moreover, in her communication specifically recommended Bill Chafe’s candidacy. Larry was dumbstruck and remained silent for a few moments. He then asked if I was sure and, when I replied “Yes,” he admitted the committee had not been informed of that!²¹ After we talked, I wrote Larry a letter, with a “cc” to Jim. “This lack of information, which the Committee should have received, kept Chafe’s candidacy dormant.” I asked: “Thus, the question. Who deliberately withheld this information from you and the Search Committee? Was it A.T. Kearney? Or did the search firm notify Middlebury and someone here withheld it from you and your colleagues? Even though it is now irrelevant, it does not diminish the importance, the seriousness, of the question.” Larry never replied, and none of this made any difference.²²

The next day, April 16, the announcement came to a packed Mead Chapel. Although some of us had assumed the result from when we heard John McCardell’s resignation and Liebowitz’s leave, that sense of hope against all odds was quickly dispelled when my History colleague Paul Monod and I arrived and saw Ron and his wife in the front row. That evening John Spencer, who had been sitting in the row behind McCardell and Liebowitz, was back home on Long Island and called. He had noticed, he said, I had not jumped up on Fritz’s announcement (he could not have seen me in the last row); I replied that we had known this since November and that Paul and I had ordered a martini downtown, probably before Ron finished his first paragraph. John did say that he had “no way to explain away the Chafe issue.” Former Middlebury trustee Decker wrote: “Thanks for the news, which does not surprise me. I too wish the new president had come

¹⁹ *Campus*, April 15, 2004.

²⁰ TBJ to Yarbrough, April 14, 2004.

²¹ Holloway to Van Gilder in Chafe’s possession, Chafe to TBJ, April 19, 2004.

²² TBJ to Yarbrough, April 19, 2004, copy attached; TBJ to Chafe, April 21, 2004. I do not know when the committee officially made its recommendation to the Board of Trustees, or when and how the full Board--by conference call or at a meeting--made its decision.

from the outside.”²³ Six days later Shelley Storbeck sent Chafe the official announcement and thanked him for “your participation in the College’s presidential search. The committee was pleased to get to know you. . . .” Bill thought I’d like the “pleased to get to know you” line.²⁴

I and other faculty members had assumed all along that Ron was John McCardell’s handpicked successor. When John was back in town for a few days in January, 2005, we had dinner on the 24th. It was a cold, wintery night, and we sat in the back of the dining room at Two Brothers Tavern. While we were talking about the college he suddenly changed the subject and asked: “Why had Ellen organized the letter to the search committee?” “Well,” I said, “because of the Commons letter,” and I do not know if he noticed that I gulped. I had sworn that I would never mention that subject to John. I had, after all, crossed him badly. (John and Bonnie gave a lovely retirement dinner at 3 South Street for John Spencer in 1998. I was sitting next to Ron. When someone across the table mentioned the Commons Ron turned to me and with a cutting tone said: “I’ve never seen anyone get away with that with John!”) Our close friendship was badly strained for two or three years, and that whole issue raced through my mind as I realized what I had said. Catching my breath, I mentioned I had done a lot of work on the letter for the search committee. I had believed, however, that the trustees would dismiss anything with my name at the top. John said that that was too bad, because the letter would have carried much more weight.

While still taken aback by opening up a subject with John that I had long avoided, I was startled by what I was inferring from John’s comment—a comment that led to a very frank discussion. He asked if I had heard about Ron and Colgate; I said “yes.” He told me that Washington and Lee, his undergraduate college, was also searching for a president during 2001-2002, and that he and Ron had agreed that each would withdraw from any consideration.²⁵ Then, with a tone and a sharpness I’ll never forget, he said: “And one did and one didn’t!” John, after all, had made a three-year commitment to the Middlebury trustees. Ron, meanwhile, kept his candidacy; although Colgate had not offered the presidency to Ron, Middlebury trustees worried about losing him. I had been wrong in my assumptions during the fall of 2002. The Middlebury trustees, or several

²³ TBJ to Ferm, April 17, 2004; TBJ to Decker, April 18, 2004. In May John Spencer and I had lunch when he was in town for a trustees’ meeting. He advised me to be quiet about the subject of Bill Chafe and drop it. He asserted that they knew he wasn’t right for Middlebury. I did not ask if he was telling me this on his own. I did, though, remind John that Decker, a former Middlebury trustee, had called him and then recommended Bill. I added, regardless of the committee’s refusal to give Bill more than a cursory look, Shelly’s obvious discomfort with Bill, and Bill’s concern that he had not had a good relationship with Shelly’s firm, his treatment was embarrassing for Middlebury College.

²⁴ Storbeck to Chafe, April 22, 2004, forwarded to TBJ that evening with his comment. Decker to TBJ, April 17, 2004. On January 5, 2007, Bill and I had a long talk at the American Historical Association annual meeting in Atlanta.

²⁵ The Washington and Lee president had died in July, 2001, and the Colgate president had resigned suddenly that month, and both schools simultaneously launched searches that fall for a president.

prominent ones, as the Colby search committee had heard, wanted Ron. John emphasized during our conversation that evening that the Board had been most generous financially and had given him an extra year. Bonnie, he mentioned, had taken what had happened harder than he had.

As the conversation continued, more and more pieces fell into place. Ron had broken a major promise and gained, in the process, the Middlebury presidency. The College had John's successor, and John announced his retirement in November, 2003. The Trustees, meanwhile, had to plan a sham search; they just could not announce Ron without a search—it was a far different situation than in 1991, when the Board suddenly fired Tim Light and John became Acting President.²⁶ It would be, thus, interesting to read the Board's Charge to the search firm; it would have been unethical, if not illegal, for A. T. Kearney Education Practice to blackball a candidate on its own. Regardless, the College spent hundreds of thousands of dollars for the search firm and inviting candidates to New York and Boston. It wasted not only the time of the candidates but also that of the faculty members on the search committee. Quite possibly Bill Chafe would have been too, too much of an outside candidate and too strong and liberal a president for the Board²⁷; in any event, the search firm and some Trustees did not know how to handle his candidacy. They never acknowledged his application; undoubtedly, they presumed no one in Middlebury would know about it. While many of us at the time believed the search was not honest, Ron would have been better served if he had become president after an open search.

²⁶ The Board gave John a two-year contract. During the spring of 1992 several faculty members, who'll remain nameless, suggested that the College should launch a national search and that, if John were the strongest candidate, he would get the position. They knew that in a national search you can usually find, for one reason or another, someone else. One or two of them conveniently forgot this argument in 2003-2004 when they supported the internal candidate.

²⁷ On June 22, 2005, the administration called an open meeting of the faculty and staff in Dana Auditorium to discuss the proposal, which the faculty opposed, to buy the Monterey Institute of International Studies. I found it interesting that Board Chair Rick Fritz spoke for some ten minutes before introducing President Liebowitz. Later, I mentioned this to John, and he subsequently told Ron that he should not let that happen again.

Appendices

- 1) Letter from Concerned Full Professors to Frederick M. Fritz, Chair, Presidential Search Committee, with signatures, March 12, 2004
- 2) Reply from Chair Fritz to Ellen Oxfeld, April 6, 2004
- 3) William H. Chafe email to Jacobs, March 12, 2004
- 4) Attachment sent by Chafe: Chafe letter to Susan Van Gilder, Applying for the Middlebury presidency, January 18, 2004
- 5) Jacobs to Jim Ralph, Search Committee, Letter of Recommendation for Bill Chafe, March 18, 2004
- 6) Jacobs letter to Larry Yarbrough, Search Committee member, with "cc" to Jim Ralph, April 19, 2004



MIDDLEBURY COLLEGE

MIDDLEBURY, VERMONT 05753

March 12, 2004

Frederick M. Fritz, Chair
Presidential Search Committee
Ridge Road,
Cornwall, Vermont 05753

Dear Mr. Fritz:

We, a group of concerned full professors who have had the good fortune of teaching at Middlebury College for many years, address this statement to the Presidential Search Committee.

The Search Committee has organized a series of discussions on campus, and we have welcomed this interest in our opinions; many of us have attended these meetings and some of us have talked individually with faculty members on the Search Committee.

We believe, nonetheless, that it is essential for us to make a collective statement expressing our conviction that the College should go outside for a new President. Middlebury College's prominence, illustrated by the quality of its students, faculty, facilities, and President John McCardell's leadership, makes the position extremely attractive. With the brief exception of President Light's tenure, the College has not gone outside since 1975. The circumstances of his departure made it crucial for the College at that time to make an exception to its traditional policy of appointing a President from the outside.

We, as concerned faculty, believe it would be unfortunate for the College not to take advantage of this marvelous opportunity to bring in a President from the outside. This would continue the pattern that led to the selection of Presidents Stratton, Armstrong, and

Robison who, in different but vitally important ways, greatly enhanced the College's local and national reputation and provided an excellent foundation for President McCardell's outstanding achievements. For us, this is the route to continue Middlebury's leadership among elite liberal arts colleges well into the 21st century.

Sincerely,

Ellen Offord

Sandra Choi



Andrew Spragg

Tanner Mayer

Kamakeli Muth

Ken Chell

Ben C. Miley

Arden

Cc: Ray Coish
Jim Ralph
Carol Rifej
Larry Yarbrough


Paul Moul

Bethany Ladimer

Jeff Byer

Elizabeth Endicott

Olivia M. Root

Michael R. 



NANCY O'Connor (by email
from FRANCE)



Neil L. Waters

Margoth Bels

Cater Baldridge



Patricia Zapp

Stephen F. Sontzen



Letter Signers

Chela Andreu-Sprigg, Professor of Spanish
Cates Baldrige, Professor of English
Jeff Byers, Professor of Chemistry and Biochemistry
Sunhee Choi, Professor of Chemistry and Biochemistry
Bob Churchill, Professor of Geography
Dave Dorman, Professor of Mathematics
Tina Endicott, Professor of History
Bob Hill, Professor of English
Travis Jacobs, Professor of History
Michael Katz, Professor of Russian; Dean of Language Schools and Schools Abroad
Bethany Ladimer, Professor of French
Jim Larrabee, Professor of Chemistry and Biochemistry
Timi Mayer, Professor of Geography
Paul Monod, Professor of History
Kevin Moss, Professor of Russian
Kamakshi Murti, Professor of German
Eric Nelson, Professor of Studio Art
Peggy Nelson, Professor of Sociology and Anthropology
Nancy O'Connor, Professor of French
Ellen Oxfeld, Professor of Sociology and Anthropology
Bob Prigo, Professor of Physics; Director, Program in Teacher Education
Tom Root, Professor of Biology
Steve Sontum, Professor of Chemistry and Biochemistry
Neil Waters, Professor of History
Patricia Zupan, Professor of Spanish



MIDDLEBURY COLLEGE

MIDDLEBURY, VERMONT 05753

April 6, 2004

c/o Ellen Oxfeld
Munroe Hall 204

Dear Faculty Signatories to Letter of March 12,

Thank you for your letter. The Presidential Search Committee stands extremely grateful for your professional devotion to Middlebury College and your keen interest in promoting its continued excellence. We discussed your letter and recommendation, a sentiment we also heard from some at campus discussions in December/early January as well as feedback, which was clearly conveyed by the faculty Search Committee members.




The Committee is bound by the Charge presented to it by the Board of Trustees and, while its stipulations are confidential, the Charge did not restrict the search to external candidates only.

We are substantially down the road in our search process, which has been diverse, national and rigorous. I am confident the Board of Trustees, responding to our recommendation, will choose an outstanding 16th President of Middlebury College who, with your support, will add to our already strong momentum among leading liberal arts colleges.

Sincerely,

Frederick M. Fritz, Chair
Search Committee

10001

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From: William H. Chafe [chafe@asdean.duke.edu]

Sent: Fri 3/12/2004 3:16 AM

To: Jacobs, Travis

Cc:

Subject: a favor

Attachments:  Attachments may contain viruses that are harmful to your computer. Attachments may not display correctly. middlebury.wpd(12KB)[View As Web Page](#)

Hi Travis,

I am writing to ask a favor that is of a rather delicate nature. As you may know, I have applied for the Middlebury presidency. I think there is a good match here, and I try to speak to that in the letter of application I have sent (see attachment). There are also letters in the file from a former trustee, Nan Keohane, our outgoing president, and Keith Brodie, her predecessor.

I have heard nothing from the search firm since my letter of nearly two months ago. I know some of the people who have been interviewed. I am somewhat surprised to not have heard anything, especially given the areas of common concern I share with Middlebury, and my ability as a fund-raiser (418 million over the course of my deanship). What is not part of the file is that I was one of three finalists for the Brown presidency, and a finalist for the Williams presidency, where I believe I would have gotten the offer had I not withdrawn at the last minute because of some concerns Lorna had (which she does not have about Middlebury).

In any event, I am puzzled. I can envision two possible reasons for the lack of contact. One of these is my age -- I just turned 62 -- and some might believe that is too old (although it does not take into account energy level). The other is the fact that I have not had a good relationship with ATKearney, and I worry that the waters may have been poisoned because of that. If age were the issue, I can understand. If not, I remain confused.

I thought that in confidence you could check out some of this with Jim Ralph or anyone else you thought appropriate. I will also appreciate it if you conclude this is not a good idea.

Thanks for considering my request. I'm in South Africa looking at another society confronting some of the same dilemmas of race and class as ours, and it's fascinating. I come back on Sunday.

Cheers,

Bill

William H. Chafe
Dean of the Faculty of Arts & Sciences
and Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education

<< middlebury.wpd >>

January 10, 2004

Susan Van Gilder
A.T. Kearney Educational Practice
333 John Carlyle St.
Alexandria, Virginia 22314

Dear Susan,

I am pleased to confirm my interest in being considered for the presidency of Middlebury College.

This past fall, I had the pleasure of delivering the Charles Grant Memorial Lecture at Middlebury. It was a wonderful experience that included exciting interactions with students, faculty and administrators. Although I had no idea then that John McCardell would be stepping down as president, I recall thinking that this would be a wonderful place to teach and serve. Now, reading through the statement you have circulated about the position, I am struck further by the degree to which my passions and priorities over the course of my career reflect to a significant degree those that have guided Middlebury's development.

Let me list briefly some of these areas of shared commitment.

As Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, I led the effort to create Curriculum 2000, a major curriculum reform that reinstated a foreign language requirement, enriched and deepened our writing program, created requirements in cross-cultural studies and ethical inquiry, mandated that every student complete basic courses in all the liberal arts, and introduced new requirements for undergraduate research experiences. I also initiated a task force on service-based learning that has launched an enormously successful cluster of courses tied to community service, both in Durham and abroad.

I chaired an undergraduate admissions task force designed to sharpen and strengthen our intellectual message to potential applicants. As a result of the work of that group, we introduced "intellectual vitality" as an added criteria for assessing our applicants – on top of GPA, SAT scores, rigor of curriculum, recommendations, extra-curricular activities, and student essays – in order to focus more on edge and creativity in our students. During my time as Vice-Provost for Undergraduate Education, our applicant pool has increased by more than 3,000 to 17,000, with a steadily increasing quality among our matriculants (their average SAT score is now 1400).

Throughout this period, diversity among students and faculty has been a key priority, for me and for Duke. During my term as Dean, the percentage of students of color in the student body has increased from 25 to 35 (11% African American, 15 % Asian American, 9 % Latino). We have also concentrated on recruiting minority faculty through our Black Faculty Strategic Initiative; as a result, the number of African American faculty in Arts and Sciences has grown from 17 to 39 (or nearly 133 percent) during my tenure.

Consistent with this concern about diversity, I led the effort to reform our residential life policies to make them more hospitable to people of different backgrounds. Before last year, fraternities and selective houses dominated the social life on our main, upper class (West) campus, and one third of all sophomores – all independents and disproportionately students of color – lived in housing removed from West. Seeking to build on the wonderful success of having all first year students live on East campus (the former Women's College), where students from all regions and backgrounds lived together and came to know each other, we proposed and implemented a policy requiring that starting in 2002, all sophomores would live on upper-class West campus. We built a new dormitory to accommodate the students, and we removed selectives and fraternities from the main corridor on West in order to make that campus more hospitable to women and minorities. I believe that no college issue is more important than campus climate, especially the ways that residential life policies embody an institution's values. I am proud that the changes we brought about at Duke have created the material foundation for creating a community where diversity is a substantive reality as well as a demographic statistic.

In keeping with Duke's commitment to interdisciplinarity as its intellectual signature, I helped create the John Hope Franklin Center for Interdisciplinary and International Studies – an incubator for new research and curricular programs in the humanities and interpretive social sciences – and this year, we created as well a new Social Science Research Institute which is designed to generate cross-disciplinary initiatives among the more quantitative social sciences. We have launched major new programs in genomics and nanoscience. I have worked hard to make our Public Policy department a national leader, and have helped create their research and teaching programs in Child and Family Policy, and Genome Ethics, Law and Policy.

In all of this I have had the honor of directing a team of superb deans and assistants – four full deans, and five associate deans. We work together to develop and implement visions for creating centers of excellence. Our goal is to make positive change happen, not manage the status quo. During my time in office, I have successfully managed an annual budget of more than \$220 million. I have also spearheaded a fund-raising campaign where I have supervised and worked closely with a full-time development staff of five. As part of the overall Campaign for Duke, I have spent 20 % of my time on the road with parents and alumni, and we have raised for Arts and Sciences a total of \$418 million, with the largest sums devoted to financial aid endowment and faculty support.

Let me stop there. I believe that Middlebury embodies the innovative attitudes and value priorities that have made my years of service in the Duke administration so rewarding. I would love to have a chance to talk more with you about these and other issues, and look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

William H. Chafe



MIDDLEBURY COLLEGE

MIDDLEBURY, VERMONT 05753

Department of History
Telephone: (802) 443-5312

March 18, 2004

Professor Jim Ralph
Presidential Search Committee

Re: William H. Chafe

Dear Jim:

I heard only a few days ago that Bill Chafe is a candidate for the presidency of Middlebury College, and I am delighted to write this recommendation. He is a prominent academic administrator and fund-raiser, and he is an excellent teacher and scholar.

I had met Bill briefly over the years and then had the opportunity to talk with him at length in New York over a year ago. At that time I asked if he would be interested in delivering the Charles S. Grant Memorial Lecture. He has written nine books, focusing especially on issues of race and gender identity, and he has established himself as one of the foremost historians of 20th Century America. He said he would be delighted to come to Middlebury, and he gave the talk during a Family Weekend last fall. And, while at Middlebury, he met with some students and had an engaging conversation with them about their projects, interests, and plans. The enclosed program for the Grant Lecture provides some additional biographical information.

More important for Middlebury College are Professor Chafe's administrative skills and fund-raising record at Duke University, one of the nation's most prominent institutions. He has served as the Dean of Faculty of Arts and Sciences since 1995 and as Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education since 1999. He led the effort for a major curriculum reform; he has played a role in increasing the quality of matriculating students and emphasized the importance of diversity among Duke's students and faculty. He has, moreover, taken the lead in reforming residential life. I find it significant that he recently returned from 10-12 days in South Africa where he was studying another society's dilemma of class and race.

During his Deanship Bill has managed the University's annual budget and raised over \$400,000,000.

Bill recently turned 62, and I do not believe that his age should weaken his candidacy for the presidency. He has terrific energy and a strong physical presence. I am

sure that the letters he has from Duke attest to his energy and commitment as well as to his proven ability for administrative and fund-raising leadership.

With his impressive credentials, his age did not prevent him, only a few years ago, from becoming a finalist for the presidency at Brown; he was, also, a finalist at Williams—he believes that he would have received the offer had he not withdrawn at the last minute; if you interview him, you can ask for his reason.

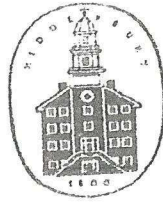
Bill Chafe has outstanding professional skills and personal characteristics, and his credentials should warrant an interview for the presidency of Middlebury College. He has the ability and the energy to provide administrative and academic leadership on campus and to earn the respect from both students and faculty, as well as from the alumni. He is a fine public speaker and in a conversation he conveys his interest, enthusiasm and commitment. He has, moreover, the essential experience as a fund-raiser; indeed, he has spent a significant part of his Deanship traveling to meet parents and alumni. In short, he could lead the College on campus and for the major fund-raising drive that must be just around the corner, and I am confident that during his presidency he would have the necessary time, energy, and determination to do so successfully.

Bill Chafe would continue and enhance Middlebury's role as one of the nation's outstanding liberal arts colleges.

With my regards,

Sincerely,

Travis Beal Jacobs
Fletcher D. Proctor Professor
of American History



MIDDLEBURY COLLEGE
MIDDLEBURY, VERMONT 05753

April 19, 2004

Department of History
Telephone: (802) 443-5312

Dear Larry:

Last Thursday we talked and you stressed that the Search Committee had taken seriously the letter from 25 full professors.

During our conversation I mentioned Bill Chafe. I said that when Karla Holloway stated, after her interview in Boston in mid-February, that she was not interested in pursuing her candidacy, she had added that she recommended Bill Chafe. You were startled, and you asked me to repeat what I had said. When I did, you stated that as a member of the Search Committee you had not received this information. (Holloway sent an email to Susan Van Gilder within a week of her Boston interview.)

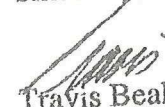
I believe you. Since talking with you, I have received confirmation that you undoubtedly did not know. This lack of information, which the Search Committee should have received, kept Chafe's candidacy dormant.

Thus, the question. Who deliberately withheld this information from you and the Search Committee? Was it A.T.Kearney? Or did the search firm notify Middlebury and someone here withhold it from you and your colleagues? Even though it is now irrelevant, it does not diminish the importance, the seriousness, of the issue.

As you may well know, Chafe applied with a letter in mid-January. Not until April 5, 2004, did he receive a reply, and that was a form email message ("I must regretfully inform you....") from Shelly Weiss Storbeck.

With my regards,

Sincerely,


Travis Beal Jacobs
Fletcher D. Proctor Professor
of American History

cc: Professor James Ralph